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ABSTRACT

Class activities for developing Spanish proficiency in third- and fourth-year high school students and first- and second-year college students are presented. Activities include a discussion of teaching for proficiency, drawing on recent research, and notes on the design and intent of the activities. Sample exercises for listening comprehension (including prelistening), oral production, writing, and reading (including prereading) skill development are included. (MSE)

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Activities for Building Students' Proficiency in Spanish Classes

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There has been a growing concern among foreign language educators to design courses and develop materials around the proficiency principle since the development of the *ACTFL Provisional Proficiency Guidelines* in 1982. Proficiency-oriented instruction aims at the development of the students' communicative competence, defining it in terms of the functions the students can perform, the contexts or situations in which they can use the language, the content or topics addressed in the interaction, and the degree of accuracy with which they can express themselves.

Accuracy includes, among other things, sociolinguistic skills. The development of the sociolinguistic skills, however, has usually been assigned an extremely low priority in the classroom. There are two possible reasons for this: (1) discourse strategies vary from region to region and even from social group to social group (Tannen, 20, 21; Thomas, 22; Schiffrin, 19; Kochman, 13; Scollon and Scollon, 18) and (2) discourse strategies used by native speakers are yet not widely understood.

In this paper we present a sample of activities for the teaching of Spanish as a foreign language which give special attention to the sociolinguistic skills involved in the listening/speaking exercise. The activities follow very closely Omaggio's (17) suggestions and model exercises. They have been designed on the framework of her hypotheses for classroom instruction (17, pp. 35–36), which she describes as providing opportunities:

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> for students to practice using language in a range of contexts likely to be encountered in the target culture . . . [providing opportunities] for students to practice carrying out a range of functions (task universals) likely to be necessary in dealing with others in the target culture . . . [reflecting] a concern for the development of linguistic accuracy . . . [responding] to the affective as well as the cognitive needs of the students [through the use of small group activities] . . . [promoting cultural understanding] so that students are prepared to understand, accept, and live harmoniously in the target-language community.

These materials would be most useful for students at the intermediate or advanced level studying their third or fourth year of high school Spanish, or for college students in their first or second year of Spanish. They can be used over such a broad range of courses because, as Magnan (16, p. 436) points out, "there is a range of proficiency levels to be expected at each level of study."

How to Teach for Proficiency

Teaching for proficiency involves teaching students to perform different functions in different contexts or situations, to deal with different contents or topics, and to perform with different degrees of accuracy. But as Galloway (6) points out, students will learn to perform different functions only with practice. This means that if we want students to learn how to disagree, complain, request/give information, and so on, we must provide them the opportunities for doing so. Eisenstein and Bodman (4) provide a number of suggestions for accomplishing this. These range from supervised activities in the classroom to opportunities outside the classroom where students can interact with native speakers or observe them in interactions.

To teach for proficiency, teachers can start by drawing on students' own everyday cultural experiences. These experiences include situations such as making appointments, accepting/refusing invitations, asking/giving directions, requesting, and so on, which in turn can be used as points of comparison to similar circumstances in the target culture. Building on this groundwork of everyday communication experiences, the teacher can then integrate information about how people in the target culture behave both linguistically, and extralinguistically (Galloway, 5).

The linguistic information from which students might profit would include not only the grammatical structures and lexical items necessary to convey meaning, but also the deference markers and routine formulas available in Spanish that help speakers "to relate to others in an accepted way" (Coulmas, 2). Knowledge of these deference markers and routine formulas helps the learner not only to understand and express politeness in utterances but to avoid what Thomas (22) calls sociopragmatic errors.

In their study of English and German deference markers, House and Kasper (11) include what they call modality markers and distinguish two kinds: downgraders and gambits. For the purpose of this paper, we will use House and Kasper's classification but include Spanish examples.

Downgraders include *politeness markers* (por favor . . ., si fuera/s tan amable . . ., perdón . . .), *playdown* (me pregunto si . . ., quisiera saber si . . .), *consultation devices* (¿le/te importaría/molestaría si . . .? ¿ud./tú cree/s que . . .?), *hedges* (más o menos . . ., y todo eso . . ., un poco . . .), *understaters* (un poquito . . ., no mucho . . ., un ratito . . ., un segundo . . .), *downtoners* (recién . . ., nada más . . ., no mucho . . ., solamente . . ., posiblemente . . .), *minus committer* (pienso que . . ., me parece . . ., creo que . . ., supongo que . . .), *forewarn* (no quiero que se/te ofenda/s pero . . ., es/eres muy amable pero . . .), *hesitater* (este . . ., ¿cómo es? . . ., ¿cómo es la cosa? . . ., bueno . . ., pues . . ., es decir . . .), *scope-staters* (mucho me temo que . . ., no me gusta el hecho de que . . .), and *agent avoiders* (todo el mundo . . ., la gente . . ., se dice que . . .).

Gambits were defined by Houser and Kasper in Edmondson's (3) terms and include what they call discourse lubricants, expressions that help to diminish the effect of an utterance. These discourse lubricants are of two kinds: cajolers and appealers. Cajolers help to establish and/or restore harmony between the interlocutors (ud./tú sabe(s) cómo es . . ., ¿ve(s)? . . ., quiero decir . . ., lo que pasa es que . . .), while appealers help elicit the interlocutor's cooperative response (¿está bien? . . ., ¿le/te parece? . . ., ¿no es cierto? . . .).

Some of the routine formulas that abound in conversation include the following: ¿Cómo estás? ¡Qué gusto verte! ¡Aquí chico! como siempre, encantado/a de conocerte, un placer, mucho gusto, salud.

The extralinguistic information that should prove useful to foreign language students includes knowledge of the kinesics and proxemics, as well as knowledge of the sociocultural rules of use (Leech, 15; Kramsch,

14; Green and Smith, 8). These seem to be acquired by native speakers simultaneously with the linguistic code (Garvey, 7), but vary from language to language. Learning sociocultural rules of use is important to the foreign language students if they are to be able to interpret and produce utterances appropriately and adequately (Canale and Swain, 1; Gumperz, 9, 10; Hymes, 12).

It will often be necessary for teachers to reconcile incongruities between the native and target culture in order to help students avoid judgments based on their own interpretations of reality. However, it is important to remember that within the teaching/learning experience it is not the role of the foreign language teacher to force the standard behavior of the target language onto the learners, but rather as Thomas (22) says, to provide learners with the necessary knowledge to express themselves as they choose and with the full realization of the effects of their behavior.

The Materials

A very important component in the development of proficiency is the authenticity of the teaching materials. Materials are authentic when they represent language "that is appropriate for a particular context . . . [and fulfill] a given communicative function" (Widdowson, 23, p. 6).

Following this criterion, the *listening comprehension* exercises proposed here provide students with authentic speech samples produced by native Spanish speakers in real situations. Some of these conversations are samples of "unmodified authentic discourse" whereas others are samples of "simulated authentic discourse" (Omaggio 17, p. 128). Unmodified authentic discourse was obtained from native speakers' interactions in a variety of contexts. Along these lines, we developed a series of videotapes in which native speakers were given a description of a particular situation and were required to interact without any restrictions as to vocabulary, grammatical structures, or even time. Samples of simulated authentic discourse were obtained by structuring dialogues based on what native speakers report they would say in given situations. Consequently, listening comprehension exercises exhibiting unmodified authentic discourse present situations that are real and language

that is authentic in its high probability of occurrence, including the normal pauses, hesitations, false starts, and so on, that are bound to occur in a normal conversational interchange.

Similarly, the *oral production* exercises encourage participation in Spanish in real-life situations. Consequently, some oral activities are linked to the listening comprehension materials while some are linked to the reading materials; others are independent from either one of them.

Following the same criterion, the *reading comprehension* exercises expose students to authentic reading materials from newspapers, magazine articles, administrative forms of varied types, classified ads, TV guides, and so on, all from Spanish-speaking countries. Additional reading materials include personal letters, notes, short essays, narratives, and descriptions.

Finally, the *writing* exercises are related to the listening comprehension exercises by encouraging the use of such techniques as note taking. At other times they are either related to the reading passages or are presented separately as independent writing tasks.

Sample Exercises

A. Listening Comprehension, Oral Production, and Writing Skills

The following exercise, *Pidiendo/Dando Direcciones para ir al Mercado* (Asking/Giving Directions to go to the Market), is a sample of a simulated authentic discourse dialogue. It has been designed for the development of listening, speaking and writing skills. Its content or topic is an everyday survival situation: asking and giving directions.

A.1 Listening Comprehension

The technique used for listening comprehension is note taking. The functions to be developed are these:

a. the understanding of main ideas and supporting details
b. the understanding of simple questions and answers
c. the detection of the mood of the message and the feelings of the speakers

Prelistening Activities

Before listening to the tape, students are divided into groups of

four, and each member of the group receives a copy of the map (see figure 1). The instructor then provides explanations about the map, specifically, about those points mentioned in the conversation.

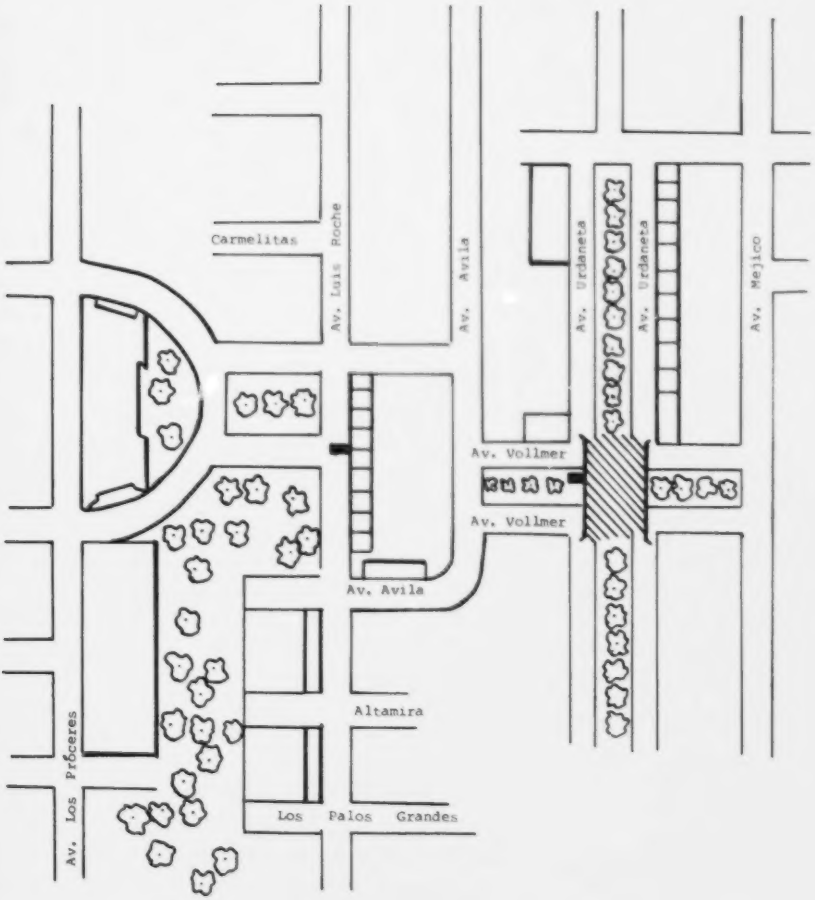
The students receive the following instructions:

> You will hear a telephone conversation between two friends in Caracas, Venezuela. One of them is new in town and is asking for directions to go to the marketplace. You will hear the dialogue twice. As you listen, take note of the information provided, since you will be asked to perform the following tasks:
>
> a. mark the route description onto a map
> b. relate the information provided to your partner
> c. give your personal reaction to the situation and describe the characters (making inferences about their personalities and imagining their physical aspects)
> d. give your partner directions to the nearest marketplace

The linguistic information provided is the following:

a. Grammatical structures: past tenses: preterite vs. imperfect; informal commands: affirmative and negative; diminutives
b. Lexical items/colloquialisms/idiomatic expressions: semáforo, carril, elevado, voltear, dar vuelta en U, peroles, pero así es, trabajandito, en la lucha.
c. Sociolinguistic aspects: The conversation is between two friends of approximately the same age. In this situation the creation of rapport is very important and a number of expressions and words are used to ensure this. These expressions include harmony maintaining devices such as *informal greetings and leave-taking formulas:* "¿aló?" (on the phone), "hola," "¿cómo estás?" "aquí, chica . . . ," "chau"; *consultation devices:* "quiero pedirte un favor" (used to preface a request) or "mira" (an informal conversation opener); *understaters:* "no es para tanto," "no te preocupes" (used to diminish the effect of an utterance); *expressions of gratitude:* "un millón" (short form for "un millón de gracias"), "muchísimas gracias"; *responses to the expression of gratitude:* "sí, cómo no" (which help to downtone the effects of a request); *in-group markers:* "tú," "chica/chico" (vocatives used between peers), elisions such as "'tá bien," "pa' comprar" used in

Figure 1


Carmelitas
Av. Luis Roche
Av. Avila
Av. Urdaneta
Av. Urdaneta
Av. Mejico
Av. Vollmer
Av. Vollmer
Av. Avila
Altamira
Av. Los Próceres
Los Palos Grandes

colloquial language; *appealers:* "¿oíste?" (used to ensure the hearer's attention); *informal closing remarks:* "nos hablamos," "chau"; *expressions of agreement:* "sí, sí . . ." (used to denote comprehension and agreement with what had been expressed before).

Class Activities

While students listen to the dialogue they take notes of the information provided. Then, they follow the instructions in the map and cooperate with members of their group.

Dialogue

Rebeca: Aló, ¿Irma? Hola, habla Rebeca, ¿cómo estás?

Irma: Aquí chica trabajandito. Y tú, ¿qué cuentas?

Rebeca: Aquí en la lucha, tú sabes cómo es. Mira quiero pedirte un favor.

Irma: Sí, chica cómo no. Dime.

Rebeca: Mira tengo que ir a Quebrada Honda pa' comprar verduras, carne, y todo eso pero no tengo la menor idea de cómo ir. José me ha dicho que no está muy lejos pero tú sabes que yo estoy recién llegada y Caracas me asusta un poco.

Irma: No te preocupes que de San Bernardino es fácil llegar a Quebrada Honda. ¿Vas a manejar o caminar?

Rebeca: Chica, yo preferiría manejar porque después tengo que cargar con todos los peroles y eso es un poco difícil; yo no tengo tanta fuerza.

Irma: Bueno, 'tá bien. Mira entonces de tu casa sales a la Avenida Los Próceres, y doblas a la derecha. Sigue por Los Próceres hasta llegar a la primera intersección a mano derecha, no sé cómo se llama esa calle pero es la que lleva al Centro Médico.

Rebeca: Sí, sí yo sé.

Irma: Bueno, entonces bajas por esa calle y sigues derecho hasta llegar al semáforo. Cuando llegas al semáforo volteas a mano derecha otra vez. Ahí, inmediatamente toma el carril de la izquierda porque vas a doblar a mano izquierda en la primera intersección, ésa el la Avenida Avila. Ten mucho cuidado porque no vas a tener mucho tiempo y en esa calle hay mucho tráfico.

Rebeca: ¡Me estás asustando!

Irma: No chica, no te preocupes no es para tanto. Bueno, entonces después cuando ya estás en la Avenida Avila sigue derecho hasta llegar al semáforo de la Avenida Vollmer. Ahí doblas a la derecha y sigues derecho hasta llegar a la intersección de Vollmer y Urdaneta.

Rebeca: Espera un ratito que estoy apuntando. De A-vi-la a Voll-mer por Voll-mer hasta Ur-da-ne-ta. Ok, sigue.

Irma: Bueno, cruzas el semáforo que está entre Vollmer y Urdanenta, pasas debajo del elevado y sigues derecho una cuadra. Como en esa intersección no puedes doblar a la izquierda vas a tener que seguir una cuadra y dar vuelta en U hasta volver a la Urdaneta, ¿me comprendes?

Rebeca: No exactamente, ya me perdiste, ¿puedes repetir lo que me acabas de decir?

Irma: Mira, cruzas el semáforo y sigues una cuadra. Al final de la cuadra vas a doblar en U a la izquierda para volver a la Urdaneta.

Rebeca: Ok, ahora sí. Pero, ¿por qué hacen las cosas tan complicadas chica? ¿Por qué tengo que hacer todo eso?

Irma: Chica, ¡y no sé! pero así es! ¡Tú sabes cómo son las cosas! Tienen que hacerle la vida difícil a uno. Pero bueno, ahora que estás en la intersección de Vollmer y Urdaneta, doblas a mano derecha y sigues derecho una cuadra. Ahí está Quebrada Honda a tu izquierda. Busca un puesto para estacionar en la calle porque nunca hay lugar en el estacionamiento a no ser que vayas muy temprano.

Rebeca: Yo quiero ir tempranito pero si salgo muy temprano me agarra el tráfico de la mañana y eso sí que es espantoso.

Irma: ¡No es para tanto chica! Vas a tener que acostumbrarte a manejar en Caracas porque si no vas a tener problemas.

Rebeca: Tienes razón, poco a poco creo yo.

Irma: Sí chica, no te preocupes.

Rebeca: Irma, muchísimas gracias. Ya te contaré cómo me fue, pero no creo que tenga ningún problema.

Irma: Ok, mira me saludas a José y a Danielito, ¿oíste?

Rebeca: Ok, un millón.

Irma: Ok, chau Rebeca, nos hablamos.

Rebeca: Chau y gracias nuevamente.

A.2 Oral Production

The techniques for the oral production activities will include story adaptation and social interaction activities (using Omaggio's terms, 17). The functions to be developed are:

a. participating in short conversations
b. asking and answering questions
c. transferring learned material to new situations

Class Activities

a. Small group work: Students, divided in small groups, perform

the following activities: one group explains the situation in general; another group speaks about its personal reaction to the situation; a third group provides a biography of one of the characters in the dialogue (Rebeca for example), using all the information provided in the dialogue as well as inferred information such as physical description, age, socioeconomic status, social adjustments, and so on.

b. Class Work: The whole class joins in a discussion of the problems that traffic in a big Hispanic city may cause.
c. Dramatization: Students participate in a similar situation, asking and giving directions in their home town; for example, how to get to a given building on the university/college campus, to the police department, to the post office, and so on.

A.3 Writing

After the students have listened to the dialogue between Rebeca and Irma and have participated orally in similar social situations, they can perform a series of writing activities. The technique to be used is composition based on a dialogue. This time the functions to be developed include the following:

a. writing short notes
b. writing letters

The linguistic information provided is the following:

a. Grammatical Structures: *ser–estar;* preterite-imperfect
b. Lexical items: *derecho, adelante, a la izquierda, a mano izquierda, a la derecha, a mano derecha, encima, debajo*

Class Activities

a. Writing instructions: Students are told that they live at Parque Residencial Anauco and are inviting a friend to a party. This friend lives at Avenida Libertador, next to INOS, and needs written instructions on how to get to the party.
b. Writing a letter: Students are told that they are writing to a

friend who lives in another city in Venezuela and wants to come to Caracas. They can write either:

1. a description of the neighborhood where they live; or
2. a description of neighboring parks and recreational facilities

c. Writing a composition: Students are asked to write a physical description of one of the participants in the dialogue they heard.

B. Reading

The following illustrates a reading exercise. The technique to be used is identifying discourse structure. The content once again is an everyday survival topic, making purchases.

The function to be developed is enabling students to read paragraphs that present simple arguments containing sentences that do not belong within the general theme of the text.

Students must identify these sentences and cross them out. This activity helps sensitize them to ineffective discourse strategies.

Prereading Activities

Before reading the short paragraphs the teacher explains that the topics will be about shopping for groceries in a Hispanic country. As they discuss the different things that can be bought at a marketplace, one student writes a list on the board.

Students receive the following instructions:

> Read the following paragraph. After reading it, underline the sentence or idea that does not belong with the text.
>
> Model
>
> Nos gusta comer en el restaurante La Casa Grande y por eso iremos este fin de semana a cenar con toda la familia. Este restaurante es de nuestro agrado en primer lugar, porque es muy limpio y también porque ahí sirven una gran variedad de platos. Además, los camareros son amables, *la cocina es amarilla* y los precios no son muy altos. Todos nuestros amigos van allí frecuentemente para comer y seguramente los encontraremos este fin de semana.

The linguistic information provided is the following:

a. Grammatical structures: present tense of verbs, future tense: regular and irregular verbs, ir a + Infinitive, gustar, present perfect tense

b. Discourse markers: primero, en primer/segundo/tercer lugar, después, también, entonces, ya, por último, finalmente
c. Lexical items: comestibles, mercado (central), supermercado, cena, zanahoria, carne, mercado, papas, yuca, tomates, cebollas, ajos, pollo, chuletas de cerdo, granja, verdulero, carnicero, precios cómodos, subir precios
d. Sociolinguistic aspects: Some of the sociolinguistic/cultural aspects to be highlighted in this lesson are grocery shopping customs in the Hispanic world (frequent visits to the marketplace, the open marketplace versus the supermarket, the personal business transactions done between the shopper and the salesperson, the existence of small specialized stores (carnicería, panadería/pastelería, verdulería/frutería), diet based on grains, cereals, beef, fish, and chicken, high cost of food products, inflation, constant rising of food prices, and so on.

Reading Texts

Diario de un ama de casa: De Compras en el mercado

1. Hoy iré al mercado central porque necesito comprar varios comestibles para la cena de esta noche y además porque en el mercado los precios son más cómodos que en el supermercado. Primero, voy a ir al verdulero y voy a comprar zanahorias bien frescas y tomates grandes. El verdulero se llama José y trae todos los productos de su granja. También quisiera comprar papas y yucas pero no sé si podré encontrarlas. Como ya tengo cebollas y ajo en la casa, no voy a comprar más. Luego iré al carnicero y buscaré carne fresca.
2. En la carnicería, mi amiga Josefina busca algo especial para su esposo, no sabe si comprar pollo o chuletas de cochino. Sabe que a él le gustan las chuletas de cochino, pero también sabe que le gusta mucho el pollo y lo mejor de todo es que el carnicero tiene pollo fresco, no congelado. Ella quiere preparar arroz con pollo. Mira en su cartera y ve que tiene suficiente dinero para comprar chuletas pero no para comprar pollo ya que el carnicero ha subido los precios recientemente.

Conclusion

The exercises presented are samples of activities for developing proficiency that we have designed for use in our classes at the Miami University Intensive Summer Workshop in Spanish. In a typical lesson, the materials not only belong to the same level but are organized around

the same topic or situation, although we might combine different functions illustrated by the samples presented above. This proved to be helpful in making our materials more flexible and enabled them to be used to their full potential. In addition, the sociolinguistic/cultural component of each lesson has been helpful in providing an understanding of certain linguistic behaviors and in helping students to communicate in Spanish not only accurately but appropriately.

Students' responses have been very encouraging. They have enjoyed working with the materials. More important, they have been able to relate to them because they provided information that was easily transferable to real-life situations.

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